St Harrison D-4 (1819-1924) 1924 MI Middle East
Bedouin 1934

dom of books, he has attained to that supreme wisdom which is a secret hidden from most schoolmen. He has learned that the world and all its material blessings are trifles compared to the things of the spirit; that the only things that are important for us to know are how to worship God and how to associate with our fellow men.

It is by the things of the spirit that the Bedouin lives. Take him away from his beloved desert with its poverty and death, its aridity and loneliness, and he will languish although his stomach may be full and his bed soft. Let him breathe the air of the desert's freedom and equality and hospitality, and his cheerfulness is unquenchable, even though his belt is tightened because of hunger and his flocks and herds are dying of thirst. The Bedouin's cheerfulness in the face of adversity is a proverb. His happy-go-lucky spirit bows to the pressure of no adverse material conditions whatever. Perhaps it is because he has so few of the various luxuries of this world to enjoy that he looks on them with such great contempt. Doubtless also his poverty has much to do with the emphasis he puts upon the things of the next world as compared to the affairs of this one. His hopes are centered the other side of the grave. To the Bedouin God is actually the greatest reality in the universe, and the greatest task of life is to please Him. Few men anywhere in the world consider their religion a matter of such vital moment as do the Sunnis, or orthodox Mohammedans, of the Arabian desert, particularly in the inland regions which have been shaken recently by the great *Akhwan* revival. We shall have occasion in later chapters to discuss the religious conceptions and practices of the Arab in more detail, but no description of desert life would be

St Harrison D-4 (1913-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Bedouin M J4

complete without at least an indication of the tremendous significance of his religion in the life of the desert nomad.

If the Bedouin were a symbol-loving Oriental, he would worship the desert. Being rather a practical and materialistic Semitic, he worships the God of the desert. Mohammedanism is little more than the Bedouin mind projected into the realm of religion. The Arab faces God as he faces the desert. Here is a vast omnipotent environment, which rules his life and which reduces him to insignificance and even nothingness in comparison. By conformity to its laws he hopes to live, and as a usual thing he can. But there is an element of caprice about the desert which makes it at times utterly cruel and ruthless, and from that ruthlessness no amount of humble acquiescence or of vigilant effort will save him. This is exactly the picture of the Moslem God. Unlimited omnipotence, governed as a usual thing by law, and usually rewarding obedience with His favor, He is still tinged with unaccountable and unpredictable caprice, and is essentially pitiless in His power and magnificence. It is the image and superscription of the desert. Long before Mohammed wrote this picture of God into the Koran, God Himself created it in the desert, and so stamped it on the Bedouin's heart. It is because Islam contains that picture that it has marched victoriously through thirteen centuries and faces the chaotic modern world with its pride and power still unbroken.

221 Fisher 9-4 (no date) 1950 MI Middle East Bedouin N34

Strict discipline, necessary both in everyday routine and because of liability to attack, has left its mark on Bedawin ways of thought. In religion, there is little room for compromise or doubt—a strong, vivid, and intolerant faith is held. Similarly, there is a strict code of behaviour. Hospitality, in an environment without fixed routes or settlements, is a highly regarded virtue, and ordinary social intercourse has been developed into an elaborate code of manners and conduct. In view of the vagaries of human existence amongst the Bedawin, it is hardly surprising that superstition and fatalism are also strongly marked. The operation of the 'evil eye' and malevolent spirits is seen in everyday life—nothing is praised directly without attributing its excellence as due to God—and men and animals wear charms.[1]

Possibly as a result of reduced physical strength, and their enforced preoccupation with household tasks, the status of women is low. Although not veiled, like the women of the settled areas, Bedawin women are regarded as in all things the inferiors of men. It may be significant that among pastoral communities, religious deities are regarded as masculine in attribute. Only in the religious systems of non-pastoral peoples do we find female deities—mother-goddesses of wide influence—with a corresponding rise in importance of women above the level of mere drudges and bearers of children.

Though Bedawin life is hard and unrewarding, those who follow it value it highly. A true Bedu looks down with disdain on other ways of life, particularly that of cultivators in better watered districts, for whom he often has a profound contempt as effete and subservient. Despite their own strict social organization, the Bedawin can contrast the dull routine of agricultural practice, and the looseness and self-indulgence of city life with their own courage, independence of thought, adventurousness, and mobility.

Nomadism is a special response to environment, by which the frontier of human occupation is pushed further within a region of increasing difficulty. In the past, nomadism has often been regarded as an unsatisfactory alternative to agriculture; it was believed that primitive man passed from a life of hunting and collecting first into a stage of pastoralism, and later, in places where conditions were favourable, to the fullest development of a life based on cultivation. In the opinion of H. J. Heure and others this view must be modified—pastoralism may, in some instances, represent a special, later development *from* agriculture—a dynamic response to environmental

[1] Even Arab taxis in the cities carry a charm on the radiator.

L Dickson G-4 (1959-47) 1941 MS I Kuwait
Bedouins MS4

656 Dirty he and his wife always are; [1] a station in the dirt of the field, a thing totally different from the dirt of the town. He never washes his clothes till they are about to drop off, and then he replaces them. He and his good wife are covered with body lice, and rock of camel manure and other choice odours, but the important parts of the body are kept clean, and the wife lashes her hair once a week in she-camel's urine, and thus rids her head of vermin for a few days.

657 Both the Bedawin and his women are envious to a degree, and cupidity is the breath of life to them. Both are so full of *hasad* and *tama'* (envy and cupidity) as anyone in this world could be, and they never tire of saying that others around them suffer from these vices but never they themselves. *Hasad* takes the form of backbiting at every opportunity, and disparaging the efforts and good name of anyone who happens to be better off. His *tama'* is proverbial and has caused him to be dubbed by certain Westerners "the arch parasite of world society". True it is that you can make a Bedawin man or woman do pretty well anything in this world except (and here I speak for the desert only) sacrifice his or her honour, by the offer of money.

Yet with all these faults I have found the Bedawin and his wife to be the most lovable and delightful of all people, pure primitive Adams and Eves, like their ancestors.

• 771 The true Bedawin is a deeply religious man, and his hard life in the desert with its perpetual dangers to man and beast increases his sense of weakness to and dependence on his Maker. The grim scenery which surrounds him, the wide sandy deserts, the blood-colour of blazing sunsets, the deep yellow-black of the dust storms, a very incarnation of monstrous evil, and last but not least the devilish flicker of the witch's eyes, as it trembles above the ground, with its cruel sister the ever-deceiving mirage, all tend to convince him that the One and Indivisible God is near him always and if only he be a true Moslemin will help him when peril is about. The thought of God is always with him, and the name of Allah is perpetually on his [771] lips. He prays ceremonially five times a day. He can and will do 577 nothing without invoking God's aid. After his duty towards God, comes duty towards his neighbour, and to a lesser extent towards himself. His whole code can be summed up in the following few sentences:

A Dickson G-6 (1929-47) 1951 Sel I Kuwait
Bedouins 1934

The Will of God

The Badawin, like every Arab or true Muslim, believes that
971 thing comes from God, both good and evil. This belief permeates his whole life; hence his musical calm and resignation when he is faced suddenly with death, loss or ruin.

"God gave, God has been pleased to take away", is an expression continually on his lips.

This piety and resignation to the will of God is one of the most striking traits in the desert man's make-up, and I confess has affected me deeply on more than one occasion, as the following little story will show.

169 My wife and I became very friendly with a certain 'Ajman family in 1930. They roamed about the hinterland of Kuwait and North Hasa, and camped almost every summer on the wells of Abu Halaifa, thirty miles south of Kuwait, or alternatively at Shu'aiba, another ten miles further south. The head of the tent was of the Al Maitfoth branch of the 'Ajman, and was a fine handsome old man of rugged countenance, about sixty years of age. He had four grown-up sons* and one daughter. The daughter, Sarah, was one of the most charming and attractive Badawin girls we had ever met in the Kuwait desert. She was married to a shaikh, Fahad al Fa'aran, a member of the Hithlain or ruling clan of the 'Ajman.

Her husband, a rebel against Ibn Sa'ud, had fled to Iraq as a fugitive in 1929, and little Sarah kept house for her father. We often used to visit Sarah's tent, and when no strange men were about, she invariably spread her scarlet bedding or *lahaf* in the women's portion of the tent for us to sit on. She, her father and we, used to discuss desert affairs over a cup of coffee which Sarah invariably handed round herself. Her brothers we rarely saw, as they spent most of their time with the camels.

Sarah had an only boy called 'Abdullah, a pretty trusting little child of two. One day, during the absence of my wife in England, 'Abdullah fell sick with a deadly sickness. I used to go and see him almost daily and did what I could for him, but the child grew worse. When he was fighting for his life it was wonderful to see the love, care and anxiety that both grandfather and mother showered on the child. He was the world to them both, and Sarah used silently to weep as I stood by trying to persuade the boy to drink some soothing medicine

* Two of these died in 1934 and 1933 respectively.

Lib. Theolgy T-S (ca. 1949) 1850 M31 Saudi Arabia
Bedouin M24

further than this, for none of them wishes to get a reputation for being a quarrelsome or trying companion, and so, when there is anything to do, they all jump up and offer to do it, whether it is to look for a camel, gather wood, or make coffee. Their life is ruled by conventions, and public opinion sees to it that these conventions are observed. In the desert there is no privacy. Every action is seen, and you might say every word is overheard, for they always live crowded together for safety; in any case, they are the most observant people in the world, and everything that happens, however trivial, is noted and later repeated and discussed, so that something which a man has said or done on the coast of the Persian Gulf will be spoken of months later, hundreds of miles away on the borders of the Yaman.

Another difference between Badu and villagers is the way they treat their animals. No Badui would ever knock his camel about; it is far too precious, and in any case he is much too deeply attached to it. You will often see him fondling and kissing his camel, and he will generally be hunting round for titbits for it. Badui, indeed, will always sacrifice their own comfort to that of their animals. Some years ago, when we arrived in the Hadhramaut out of the desert, I remember the enormous meals which were provided for us, such as my always hungry companions cannot even have dreamed of; yet next day they were frantic to get back to the desert where there would be proper grazing for their animals. Sometimes, looking at a wonderful view, I have said to a Badui, "Isn't that lovely!" and he has looked round for a bit and answered, "No, it is rotten bad grazing," and he saw nothing else, whereas if he had been a Persian he would have rhapsodized over it.

Yet they are passionately fond of poetry. They are a noisy, talkative race. I think many of them would find it as hard to stop talking as a heavy smoker to stop smoking, but they will sit for hours in silence if someone is reciting poetry. They are also deeply religious, and in their hard lives they derive at all times a profound comfort from their faith. Townsmen often scoff at them and say that they are little better than pagans because they do not observe all the ritual of Islam and are sometimes lax over their prayers and fasting, but you cannot be with them without realizing what an integral part of their everyday lives their religion is. A Rashdi once described to me how alone he had crossed the trackless wastes of the Eastern sands for 450 waterless miles. Astounded that anyone should have ventured on such a journey unaccompanied, I asked him, "Do you really mean that you were by yourself?" and he answered me quite simply, "God was my companion."

The Badu are the product of their environment, and it is the constant struggle for survival which has fashioned them as they are. Security is unknown to them and their rewards are at all times pitifully small. At any moment drought, disease, or raiders may sweep their herds away. Yet, tempered from childhood by wind and sun, they face life unflinchingly. In this harsh and barren land the desert lad mates only with the desert maid, for who else would share the Badu's couch among the wind-blown sand? For centuries they have guarded the purity of their blood with the dagger, and they are fine-drawn, highly strung, and unstable as thoroughbreds.